

Influence of Gossip Media on Political Attitudes of Various Thinkers

How Need for Cognition Interacts with Media
Influence

Yekaterina Yushchenko and Professor Joanne Miller

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Abstract: This study sought to look at how people of different levels of need for cognition are influenced by hidden political messages in gossip media. Results were collected by testing college students on their opinions on gun control and crime related issues before and after consuming a piece of biased gossip, nonbiased gossip (control), and biased news media. This study found that high need for cognition people were influenced by biased media significantly more than those low in need for cognition. Despite the frivolous appearance of gossip media, this study found that both gossip and news media were significant influencers of opinion, but only for high need for cognition individuals and on separate issues.

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Introduction

Can reading gossip magazines influence political attitudes? How might different kinds of thinkers be influenced by such hidden persuasion? Past research in the fields of psychology and political science have developed theories on how individuals process and are affected by information. Recent research by Kenneth Mulligan and Phillip Habel has found that fictional stories are able to frame ideas just like news reports do, directing the consumer to give attention to a particular issue in a preconceived way. Although study participants were aware of the fictional nature of the story in Mulligan and Habel's study, their political attitudes towards abortion shifted significantly after watching a movie depicting a tragic pregnancy (Mulligan, 2011). Another study has found that exposure to fictional government conspiracies increases viewer's likelihood of believing in real government conspiracies (Mulligan, 2012).

When it comes to gossip media specifically, individuals generally view this mode of conveying information as frivolous (Lui, 2013). However, we predict that gossip media can be just as powerful of a persuader as news media, if not more so. Because gossip media causes people to think less critically and more personally, it may influence readers to make connections to political issues through the peripheral, or less logical, route of thinking as established in the Elaboration Likelihood Model. The central and peripheral routes of taking in information distinguish how an individual processes that information. When new information is processed through the central route, the message is cognitively scrutinized and attitude change occurs if positive cognitive markers are present. If a message goes through the peripheral route, the information is processed on snap judgements and reliance on positive or negative cues, such as likability of the source and positive or negative emotions displayed (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). Because gossip media is considered to be frivolous, people may immediately process it through the peripheral route and thus be more susceptible to snap judgements and easily planted peripheral cues.

In addition to mode of media, the primary goal of this study is to identify how different types of thinkers are influenced by hidden political messages. Social scientists have identified two markers of how people take in information, especially information that may persuade them in a particular way. One marker, "need for cognition" refers to an individual's predisposition to thinking carefully and enjoying personal cognitive development (Petty et al., 2009). Another,

“need to evaluate”, refers to the extent in which an individual immediately judges new information and experiences as good or bad (Bizer et al., 2000; Jarvis and Petty, 1996). When it comes to receiving politically persuasive information, individuals with a high need for cognition are likely to evaluate arguments through a central route of thinking. Individuals with a lower need for cognition are more likely to take the peripheral route (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981).

Based on these differences, we predict that gossip media will influence high need for cognition thinkers more than low need for cognition thinkers. Due to the petty nature of gossip media, high need for cognition thinkers are likely to not think critically about it, or “excuse” themselves from the tedious act of thinking everything through all day. Because gossip media typically presents itself as less serious, high need for cognition thinkers may switch off their critical thinking while consuming it in order to give themselves an analytical break. This will leave them more susceptible to hidden political propaganda than their low need for cognition peers, who will read the gossip media like any other source of information. The influence they face may be less significant because they, unlike the high need for cognition individuals, will not have their guard down.

Methods

To best address this research question, we first selected an issue to test. The political issue chosen was gun control. This issue was chosen based on the assumption that most college students at the University of Minnesota (our available survey population) would have an idea of where they stand, but that they wouldn’t be as firm in their beliefs as they would for a polarizing issue like marriage equality.

After selecting a political issue to focus on, I wrote two articles with pro-gun control attitudes attached and selected one control article with no messages about guns or crime. To specifically test gossip media, two of the articles were framed as celebrity gossip articles from STAR magazine. The control piece, which was pulled directly from the STAR website, was about drama between Demi Moore and Mila Kunis, and had no mention of guns or crime [Appendix A]. I then wrote a gossip article about Shaquille O’Neil. This article, while written in the same tone and labeled as coming from STAR, included information about a possible gun crime inside an LA nightclub. While the focus of the story remained on celebrity gossip,

mentions of blood, guns, and violence were included, as well as a shocking commentary on how gun altercations occur in grade schools [Appendix B]. The third fictional article was framed as a straight news story about gun violence. Carrying the USA Today label, this story discussed how gun violence was on the rise in California night clubs and how residents of the state were worried [Appendix C]. This article was included to see how study participants would be influenced by a piece of media that is pro-gun control directly, rather than the indirect method of the gossip media piece. These articles were the independent variable of this study.

After choosing a focus issue and developing the reading material, a questionnaire was developed to test participant's political viewpoints. This questionnaire asked respondents to rate their agreement or stance with a political statement on a one to eleven scale. The questions included ranged from gun control and crime specific to unrelated political questions included to disguise the study's purpose. Two political questionnaires were developed. Both had the same questions on gun control and crime, but unrelated questions varied. This was done to make the surveys appear different from one another. For the purposes of this study, data on attitude change needed to be collected. Study participants received the two questionnaires, each with identical gun control and crime questions, before and after reading the pieces of media they were given. Variances in responses to these questionnaires became a participant's difference score and were the dependent variable of this study.

Other relevant information was collected on participants in this study. Each survey included demographic questions and a place to put the last four digits of one's phone number, for form matching purposes. Surveys were anonymous. The first set of surveys also included measures for need for cognition, as well as need to evaluate. The need to evaluate scale, which measures how judgmental an individual is, was included as a possible cause for variation. To keep the length of this study minimal, each scale was shortened to include ten statements. Students ranked their agreement with each statement from one to five. For each individual scale, participants were later assigned a total score. This total score, which ranged from a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 50, were used to determine differences between high need for cognition and low need for cognition students on their answers to the political questionnaire. In addition to these scales, the second survey included a transportation scale adopted from research by Melanie Green and Timothy Brock. This scale measured how involved and attentive participants were

when reading the written portion of the study (Green and Brock, 2000). This scale included seven questions, and ranked participants similarly to the need to evaluate and need for cognition scales.

This study was conducted in college classrooms. Professors agreed to have their classes participate in two study sessions approximately three weeks apart. Student participation was voluntary, and they were compensated by entry into a gift card raffle. During the first session students answered questions on their need for cognition, need to evaluate, political opinions, and demographics [Appendix D]. During the second session three weeks later, students randomly received one of the three articles. After reading the article they were asked questions about how involved they were in the article and how they felt about it. Then, they were given the second political questionnaire and asked demographic questions [Appendix E]. A level of deception was involved, as the article and political questions were made to look like separate studies through labeling. Students were debriefed on this in a debriefing form after the study. This form also explained that two of the articles were fictional and created by the researchers for the purpose of this study [Appendix F].

The classes that participated included political science classes, business classes, and creative writing classes. The total sample size for the first survey was 320 students, while the total sample size of the second survey was 246 students. There were 213 students who answered both surveys, making that the observable amount of difference scores and the final sample size of this study. Of those participants, a near equal amount received each of the three articles. When further divided into low need for cognition and high need for cognition, the average sample size for each cognition and article group was approximately 36 people. This split was made using the median, with 50% of respondents to the scale landing in both the low and high need for cognition categories.

After data was collected, it was entered and analyzed by SPSS statistics. When analyzing data, we looked at whether study participants' answers to identical gun control and crime questions on the first and second survey differed, depending on which media story they were randomly assigned to read. To find the difference between the first and second surveys we first matched surveys of each participant by using acquired form matching data. We then coded each gun control and crime question to make traditionally liberal values higher and conservative

values lower. Next, we subtracted the second survey response from each participant's first. Due to the coding, higher difference values meant a shift in the liberal direction, while a lower difference score meant a shift towards a more conservative stance. A value of zero meant no change in opinion.

To get to our main research question, we examined whether need for cognition moderated the effect of media story on change in gun control and crime attitudes. To do this, we compared how low and high need for cognition thinkers differed in their average difference scores depending on what article they received. We also tested other possible moderators, such as need to evaluate and involvement. To test relationships between these variables and measured differences in political opinion, we used the t-test and ANOVA method.

Results

We found that students high in need for cognition were more likely than students low in need for cognition to have their political opinion swayed by the gossip article that included political messages. According to a t-test, participants with high need for cognition shifted their opinion by an average of 1.97 points in favor of gun control after reading the gossip article. This was significantly different from high need for cognition students in the control group, whose opinion shifted an average of 0.73 points. It was also significantly different from the low need for cognition participants who read the same gossip article with political messages [Table 1].

Table 1
(n = study participants)

Assault Weapons Ban Change in Opinion	N	Low Need Cognition	n	High Need Cognition
Gossip Article with Political Messages	41	0.34	32	1.97
Control Article	31	0.39	40	0.73

According to the t-test, there was no significant difference in the responses from low need for cognition

participants with different articles. In other words, when the results for shifts in opinion of both high and low need for cognition students were combined, the average shift of opinion after reading the gossip article was not significant. However, when separated, high need for cognition

people were significantly more affected by the hidden political message in the gossip article [Table 1]. This significant difference appeared on only one gun control question on the political questionnaire: support for an assault weapons ban. On this issue, high need for cognition gossip article readers had positive difference scores, indicating an opinion shift in the liberal direction after reading an article with a hidden liberal political message. Other gun control questions, such as support for background checks, were not affected by the articles given.

The other statistically significant difference score found in this study was on the issue of mandatory minimums. Since this was a crime related question on the political questionnaire, it was included in both the first and the second survey given to participants. For the mandatory minimum issue, we coded support with higher values (liberal) and opposition as lower values (conservative). Here, we found that readers of the news article were significantly swayed in support of mandatory minimums, while readers of the gossip article with political messaging were slightly against mandatory minimums. In this instance, high need for cognition people were the ones again affected.

Table 2
(n = study participants)

The measured difference in opinion of high need for cognition readers of the gossip article (-0.41) and high

Mandatory Minimums Change in Opinion	n	Low Need Cognition	n	High Need Cognition
Gossip Article with Political Messaging	41	-0.24	32	-0.41
News Article	35	0.31	34	0.97

need for cognition readers of the news article (0.97) was statistically significant. The difference scores between low and high need for cognition people who read the news article were all statistically significant [Table 2]. When combined with the low need for cognition results, overall averages were not significantly different.

In both of these instances, high need for cognition people were significantly more likely than low need for cognition people to have their political opinion swayed by an article. On guns, a gossip article with hidden liberal political messages appeared to influence readers to favor gun control. On mandatory minimums, simply reading a news article about crime led participants to have greater support for mandatory minimums. The other variables measured, need to evaluate

and involvement, did not moderate the effect of the articles on gun control or crime difference scores.

Discussion

These results were found to be consistent with the original hypothesis. High need for cognition people had their opinion on gun control significantly shift in the liberal direction after reading a gossip article with hidden pro-gun control messages. Meanwhile, low need for cognition people were not affected by the articles. The news article did not shift gun control opinions significantly, but it did shift opinions in favor of mandatory minimums in high need for cognition readers.

These results can be explained by several factors. The first factor is connectivity in thinking. By definition, high need for cognition people enjoy thinking and thus actively seek out opportunities to do so (Petty et al., 2009). This means that while they are consuming media, a high need for cognition person is likely to be making more connections, or having more thoughts about, that particular piece. One thought leads to another as high need for cognition people draw connections and conclusions about the content discussed in media. In the case of the gossip article with hidden political messages, high need for cognitions readers may have, consciously or subconsciously, made the connection to gun control. Due to the violence in the article, this connection may have biased them towards a stronger pro-gun control stance. Meanwhile, low need for cognition people did not make this extra connection and thus did not acquire the new bias.

Another possible reason for the high need for cognition shift in gun control opinion may be due to the nature of the article. Because celebrity gossip is generally considered to be frivolous media (Lui, 2013) and thus not worth serious attention, high need for cognition thinkers may have regarded it as something that they did not need to think critically about. While high need for cognition people generally take in information through the central route (Petty et al., 2009), due to its less serious regard gossip media may be thought of through the peripheral route. For the gossip article, readers processing the information through a peripheral route may have relied on the overall negative feeling and commotion an instance of gun violence caused in the article, rather than thinking critically about the issue. If high need for cognition people processed

the article through the peripheral route, they may have been more exposed to these underlying cues. Tipped off by the frivolous gossip style of the article, high need for cognition readers may have dimmed their critical thinking in order to rest from their regular efforts. Paradoxically, this may have left them more vulnerable to the article's hidden political messages. This vulnerability may have led to the significant differences in shift of opinion between low and high need for cognition thinkers that this study found.

Although compelling, the possibility that high need for cognition people think less critically about gossip media and are thus more susceptible to information does not explain why low need for cognition people, who generally process information through the peripheral route anyway (Petty et al., 2009), would see no significant shift in opinion after consuming the same media. It is also important to note that neither high nor low need for cognition people saw a significant shift in gun control opinion from the news article. This means that on this issue, the gossip article was persuasive while the news article was not significantly so. Meanwhile, low need for cognition people were not swayed by any of the media.

The other significant finding in this study was the attitude shift on the issue of mandatory minimums. Again, this shift occurred only for high need for cognition individuals. The news article, which discussed gun crime issues overall, swayed high need for cognition study participants' opinions in favor of mandatory minimums. Meanwhile, the gossip piece that also described gun violence shifted readers' opinions in the opposite direction. These findings suggest that merely reading about crime news can cause people's attitudes to shift towards being tougher on crime. This finding is especially interesting because the mandatory minimum question was specifically drug related, while the news article was not. According to this data, it appears that reading about violent crime can make people stricter on nonviolent crime as well.

In this study, gossip media with hidden political messages directly influenced gun control attitudes. News media did not significantly influence gun control attitudes, but did influence attitudes on crime and justice. Both of these results were for high need for cognition thinkers only, as low need for cognition participants were not significantly influenced in either case. When we examined the impact of the articles by themselves, there were no differences overall. It was only when we took need for cognition into account that we found the articles to have an effect on a few attitudes, and only among high need for cognition individuals. This study found

high need for cognition thinkers to be relatively suggestable, although the results show that specific political issue and mode of media may be related to how influential the propaganda truly is.

Conclusion

This study sought to look at how people of different levels of need for cognition are influenced by hidden political messages in gossip media. Results were collected by testing college students on their opinions on gun control and crime related issues before and after consuming a piece of biased gossip, nonbiased gossip (control), and biased news media. This study found that high need for cognition people were influenced by biased media significantly more than those low in need for cognition. Despite the frivolous appearance of gossip media, this study found that both gossip and news media were significant influencers of opinion. Thus, gossip magazines and reality television likely do influence some individual's political attitudes. Interestingly, the people most susceptible are those high in need for cognition.

These findings are significant because they contradict to the common notion that critical thinking makes people harder to influence or fool. The results observed here contrast that idea by showing that higher need for cognition people were more susceptible to influence from both gossip and news media, on separate issues [Table 1 and Table 2]. These results cause us to question whether thinking a lot is really a good thing, or if sometimes just going with the flow makes one less likely to be carried off by the tide.

One significant limitation to this study is the length of time between media consumption and political attitude assessment. Study participants were evaluated on their gun control and crime attitudes immediately after reading an article about these issues. This study did not test for how long these attitudes lasted. The effects observed are immediate, and are potentially temporary. However, when reinforced by further media consumption, these effects are likely to form permanent attitudes. For example, if individuals continue to consume crime related news, the support of mandatory minimums observed in this study may become a more long-lasting "tough on crime" attitude. Further research needs to be done on how long political attitudes provoked by media consumption last, and how they are reinforced. Regardless, this study points

to the fact that high need for cognition thinkers are more susceptible to attitude change influenced by media.

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Demi Moore is Driving Mila Kunis Nuts!

By [Star Staff](#), November 27, 2014



[Mila Kunis](#) loves spending time with her and [Ashton Kutcher's](#) new [baby girl](#), Wyatt Isabelle. But lately, she's been dealing with another addition to the family that she could certainly do without — Ashton's ex-wife, [Demi Moore](#)!

Ever since Wyatt's Sept. 30 birth, Demi has been calling and texting Ashton, requesting constant updates on his daughter and begging to come visit. And it's been driving Mila insane. "Demi has been acting almost like a third parent," says an insider. "She barely gives Ashton and Mila a second to breathe. This is Mila's first child and she wants to bask in the beauty of becoming a parent with her fiancé, not her fiancé's ex-wife!"

Perhaps Demi has been spoiled by ex-husband **Bruce Willis** and his wife, **Emma Heming**, who allow her to drop in unannounced on their daughters Mabel and Evelyn. But, as the insider points out, "that makes more sense because Demi and Bruce have kids together. With Demi and Ashton, there really isn't any reason for them to be speaking."

Of course, that didn't stop Ashton from inviting Demi to his daughter's Kabbalah naming ceremony on Oct. 8 — a decision that annoyed Mila to no end. "The event turned into people whispering about Mila, Ashton and his ex being in the same room," the insider says. "It was so strange."

Demi is always polite and cordial, but Mila can't help but question her intentions. After all, it wasn't long ago that Demi dragged her heels on signing divorce papers in order to hold her ex hostage. "Demi is really crossing a line," the insider adds. "It's making Mila uncomfortable."

Shots Fired at LaBelle Nightclub! Shaquille O'Neil Caught in the Mix

By [Star Staff](#), January 5th, 2015

Shots fired! Party goes in a frenzy to evacuate, and reports of blood! According to eyewitness sources, several shots were fired at LaBelle Nightclub last Saturday night. Unfortunately, award winning sports star [Shaquille O'Neil](#) found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time. Although Shaquille was not injured, rumor has it that his ex-girlfriend, [Vanessa Lopez](#), may have been involved.



That night seemed to start like any other for Shaquille. The basketball legend arrived at [LaBelle Nightclub in Los Angeles](#) at 1am, buzzed already, according to inside sources. Surrounded by his posse, the baller began to drink and dance the night away. His [recent experience as a DJ](#) made him especially attentive to the music, noted an inside source who partied in his VIP.

Then, at approximately 3am, Shaquille's happy exterior was shattered with several loud shots.

"No one knew what was going on," said our insider. "I could hear Shaq yelling. He was instantly surrounded by his body guards. After hearing the shots I just ran. I didn't see much other than people, trying to escape too. I could see a splatter of blood left of me, near the other VIP. I remember because I dropped my purse, and it barely missed the blood on the floor."

No deaths or injuries were reported at the scene, but Los Angeles police say that they have contacted hospitals nearby to be alerted of a possible witness coming in for treatment to a gun related wound. Although police say that they cannot disclose any leads at this time, rumors are flying that the target of the attack may have been Shaquille.

"We were terrified. The shots were so close to [Shaquille's] VIP," says our inside source.

Our favorite player Shaq has been in the media quite a bit lately. His former mistress Vanessa Lopez filed [several claims against him in court](#), including racketeering, invasion of privacy, and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

It is unclear who let off shots at LaBelle. Shaquille O'Neil has yet to comment on the incident.

"I don't like guns," says our insider. "And Shaq isn't a big fan either. He hates violence. I know this has affected him. I thought this sort of thing only happened in schools or whatever. But a high class LA nightclub? What is the world coming to?"

Indeed, what is the world coming to? Star will keep you updated on this shocking developing story.

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Gun Violence on the Rise in LA Nightclubs

[Jim Bacon](#), USA TODAY 10:46 p.m. EST January 6, 2015

LOS ANGELES – Gun violence has been increasing in many Los Angeles nightclubs, leading to unrest among employees and guests across the industry. Aside from the notable incident last week involving shots fired at a high class nightclub, there have been three incidents of gun violence in Los Angeles clubs over the past year. This is up from one incident the year before.

Typically, gun violence occurs after a night of partying, not during it. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, over 30% of all violent crimes involve alcohol. Owners of guns are also more likely to hurt themselves, not others, when intoxicated.

However, members of the Los Angeles nightclub workforce are still worried.

“We’ve definitely noticed the spike [in gun violence],” says John, a bouncer at LaBelle Nightclub in Los Angeles, where shots were fired last week. “It’s scary for us, being the ones that have to take care of it and keep people safe. We’ve been asking management to install metal detectors, but they won’t do it. The problem is, the type of people that visit these clubs don’t like feeling like they’re going through airport security. They don’t want to be patted down, either. And that puts everyone at risk.”

In general, gun violence has been making news around the world after several high profile incidents involving grade schools in the United States. Many advocate for a restriction in access to firearms as a solution to the problem.

It is estimated that over 100,000 Californians currently own registered weapons. Current gun market trends indicate that that number is on the rise, with a 5% increase in gun sales since 2012. But as the members of the nightclub community get ready to begin their long nights of work, this fact is weighing heavy on their hearts.

“I have a family too, you know,” says LaBelle bouncer John. “And I want to come home to them tomorrow.”

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH

Students' Social and Political Attitudes and Attitudes About the Media

You are invited to be in a research study of people's social and political attitudes and attitudes about media stories. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an undergraduate at the University of Minnesota. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Yekaterina Yushchenko, an undergraduate student in the Political Science Department.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
Complete a survey today, that will take around 10 minutes. I'll be back in a few weeks to ask you to complete a second survey that will around 15 minutes.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota . If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher(s) conducting this study is (are): Yekaterina Yushchenko and Professor Joanne Miller (advisor). You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact them at 1354 Social Sciences, 612-625-8857, yushc001@umn.edu, mille441@umn.edu, , .

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Appendix D

Please write the last 4 digits of your phone number here:

Today you will be participating in a study related to personality and political opinions. Please answer all questions honestly. Do not overthink or dwell on questions. Thank you for your time.

Study Administrator: Kat Yushchenko (yushc001@umn.edu)

Appendix D

People have varying political opinions. For each of the following issues, some people believe one way and some another. Using the 11 point scale provided, please circle where your opinion falls for each issue.

Do you favor or oppose the health care reform law passed in 2010, also known as the Affordable Care Act and Obamacare? This law requires all Americans to buy health insurance and requires health insurance companies to accept everyone.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly					indifferent					strongly
oppose										favor

Do you favor or oppose a federal policy that would legalize recreational marijuana use?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly					indifferent					strongly
oppose										favor

President Obama recently proposed a plan for the government to provide two years of community college to all qualifying students. Do you favor or oppose this policy?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly					indifferent					strongly
oppose										favor

Should the federal government make it easier or more difficult for individuals to purchase firearms?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
much					no change					much
more										easier
difficult										

Do you favor or oppose providing a legal way for undocumented immigrants already in the United States to become U.S. citizens?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly					indifferent					strongly
oppose										favor

Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly					indifferent					strongly
oppose										favor

Do you favor or oppose a federal policy that would legalize recreational cocaine use?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly					indifferent					strongly
oppose										favor

Appendix D

Should the federal government make it easier or much more difficult for individuals to have abortions?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
much more difficult					no change					much easier

Do you favor or oppose a federal law that would ban the private ownership of semi-automatic weapons?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly oppose					indifferent					strongly favor

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as president?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly disapprove					indifferent					strongly approve

Do you favor or oppose changing the legal drinking age to 18 nationwide?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly oppose					indifferent					strongly favor

Do you favor or oppose the mandatory labeling of foods that include GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly oppose					indifferent					strongly favor

Do you favor or oppose a federal law that would require background checks of people seeking to purchase a gun?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly oppose					indifferent					strongly favor

Do you favor or oppose mandatory minimum sentencing? Mandatory minimums require judges to grant a mandatory minimum amount of years in prison for persons found guilty of particular crimes, especially drug crimes, regardless of the judge's personal opinion.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly oppose					indifferent					strongly favor

Overall, how would you rate your understanding of the important political issues facing our country?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
very										very

Appendix D

poor

good

For each of the statements below, please indicate to what extent the statement is characteristic of you. Using the following scale, please write the number that corresponds to how characteristic the statement is of you.

- 1 = extremely uncharacteristic
- 2 = somewhat uncharacteristic
- 3 = uncertain
- 4 = somewhat characteristic
- 5 = extremely characteristic

1. I form opinions about everything. _____
2. I prefer to avoid taking extreme positions. _____
3. I want to know exactly what is good and bad about everything. _____
4. I often prefer to remain neutral about complex issues. _____
5. I enjoy strongly liking and disliking new things. _____
6. It bothers me to remain neutral. _____
7. I like to have strong opinions even when I am not personally involved. _____
8. I have many more opinions than the average person. _____
9. I would rather have a strong opinion than no opinion at all. _____
10. I am pretty much indifferent to many important issues. _____
11. I would prefer complex to simple problems. _____
12. Thinking is not my idea of fun. _____
13. I would rather do something that requires little thought than something that is sure to challenge my thinking abilities. _____
14. I only think as hard as I have to. _____
15. I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems. _____
16. Learning new ways to think doesn't excite me very much. _____
17. The notion of thinking abstractly is appealing to me. _____

Appendix D

18. I would prefer a task that is intellectual, difficult, and important to one that is somewhat important but does not require much thought. _____

19. It's enough for me that something gets the job done; I don't care how or why it works. _____

20. I usually end up deliberating about issues even when they do not affect me personally. _____

Now we want to ask you some questions about yourself.

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent?

Republican Democrat Independent Other _____

What is your gender? Male Female Other _____

What is your race?

White Black Hispanic/Latino Asian Native American Pacific Islander
Other _____

What year are you in college? Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Other

Were you born in the United States (yes or no)? _____

If you weren't born in the United States, for how many years have you lived here? _____

What is your age (in years)? _____

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH

Students' Social and Political Attitudes and Attitudes About the Media

You are invited to be in a research study of people's social and political attitudes and attitudes about media stories. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an undergraduate at the University of Minnesota. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Yekaterina Yushchenko, an undergraduate student in the Political Science Department.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
Complete a short reading and a survey, taking approximately 15 minutes.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher(s) conducting this study is (are): Yekaterina Yushchenko and Professor Joanne Miller (advisor). You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact them at 1354 Social Sciences, 612-625-8857, yushc001@umn.edu, mille441@umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Appendix E

Please write the last 4 digits of your phone number here:

Today you will be participating in two studies. The first will collect your opinion on a given article. The second will measure your political attitudes and demographic information. Please answer all questions honestly. Do not dwell on or overthink questions. Thank you for your time.

Administrator of Studies: Kat Yushchenko (yushc001@umn.edu)

Please read the following article

Appendix E

Survey 1

Please circle one response for each of the following questions.

Circle the number under each question that best represents your opinion about the article you just read.

1. While I was reading the article, I could easily picture the events in it taking place.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						very much

2. While I was reading the article, activity going on in the room around me was on my mind.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						very much

3. I was mentally involved in the article while reading it.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						very much

4. After the article ended, I found it easy to put it out of my mind.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						very much

5. The article affected me emotionally.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						very much

6. I found my mind wandering while reading the article.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						very much

7. The events in the article are relevant to my everyday life.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						very much

Appendix E

How interesting was the article you just read?

extremely interesting	very interesting	somewhat interesting	not too interesting	not at all interesting
--------------------------	---------------------	-------------------------	------------------------	---------------------------

If you were to see this article outside of this study, how likely is it that you would read it?

extremely likely	very likely	somewhat likely	not too likely	not at all likely
---------------------	----------------	--------------------	-------------------	----------------------

How accurate do you think this article was?

extremely accurate	very accurate	somewhat accurate	not too accurate	not at all accurate
-----------------------	------------------	----------------------	---------------------	------------------------

How angry did this article make you feel?

extremely angry	very angry	somewhat angry	not too angry	not at all angry
--------------------	---------------	-------------------	------------------	---------------------

How sad did this article make you feel?

extremely sad	very sad	somewhat sad	not too sad	not at all sad
------------------	-------------	-----------------	----------------	-------------------

How afraid did this article make you feel?

extremely afraid	very afraid	somewhat afraid	not too afraid	not at all afraid
---------------------	----------------	--------------------	-------------------	----------------------

How favorable is your opinion of actor Ashton Kutcher?

1 not at all favorable	2	3	4	5	6	7 very favorable
------------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	------------------------

How favorable is your opinion of actress Mila Kunis?

1 not at all favorable	2	3	4	5	6	7 very favorable
------------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	------------------------

How favorable is your opinion of athlete Shaquille O'Neil?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Appendix E

not at all
favorable

very
favorable

Survey 2

People have varying political opinions. For each of the following issues, some people believe one way and some another. Using the 11 point scale provided, please circle where your opinion falls for each issue.

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly disapprove					indifferent					strongly approve

Do you favor or oppose allowing same-sex couples to get married?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly oppose					indifferent					strongly favor

Do you favor or oppose a federal policy that would legalize recreational marijuana use?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly oppose					indifferent					strongly favor

Do you favor or oppose closing the Guantanamo Bay prison for terror suspects?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly oppose					indifferent					strongly favor

Should the federal government make it easier or more difficult for individuals to purchase firearms?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
much more difficult					no change					much easier

Do you think the income gap between the rich and everyone else is growing, shrinking, or staying the same?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
shrinking					staying the same					growing

Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly oppose					indifferent					strongly favor

Appendix E

Do you believe that climate change is a major threat to the world?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
no not at all					indifferent					yes very

Do you favor or oppose a federal law that would ban the private ownership of semi-automatic weapons?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly oppose					indifferent					strongly favor

Do you favor or oppose changing the legal drinking age to 18 nationwide?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly oppose					indifferent					strongly favor

Do you believe that religion should play a significant role in United States politics?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
no not at all					indifferent					yes very

Do you favor or oppose a federal law that would require background checks of people seeking to purchase a gun?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly oppose					indifferent					strongly favor

Do you favor or oppose mandatory minimum sentencing? Mandatory minimums require judges to grant a mandatory minimum amount of years in prison for persons found guilty of particular crimes, especially drug crimes, regardless of the judge's personal opinion.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly oppose					indifferent					strongly favor

Do you favor or oppose increased economic sanctions against Russia?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strongly oppose					indifferent					strongly favor

Appendix E

Now we want to ask you some questions about yourself.

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent?

Republican Democrat Independent Other _____

What is your gender? Male Female Other _____

What is your race?

White Black Hispanic/Latino Asian Native American Pacific Islander
Other _____

What year are you in college? Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Other

Were you born in the United States (yes or no)? _____

If you weren't born in the United States, for how many years have you lived here? _____

What is your age (in years)? _____

Appendix F

Debriefing

Students' Social and Political Attitudes and Attitudes About the Media

In this study, we were interested in whether information conveyed in a gossip magazine article would have an impact on people's political attitudes, and whether people with different thinking styles would be more or less affected by the magazine article. In the first session of this study, you answered some questions about your political attitudes and your thinking style (whether or not you are the type person who generally likes to think all the time, and whether or not you are the type of person who generally likes to evaluate things as good or bad). In the second session (which was actually all part of the same study), you first read an article. Students were randomly assigned to read one of three different articles. Some of you (the control group) read a story about Demi Moore. Others of you read a story about Shaquille O'Neil being at a club in LA where gun shots were fired. A third group read a story about gun violence at nightclubs in general. IMPORTANT: *whereas the Demi Moore story came directly from a magazine (Star), the other two stories were created by us specifically for this study.* We're interested in testing the hypothesis that people who read the gun story involving Shaquille O'Neil would be more likely to express pro-gun control attitudes than people in the other 2 conditions, and that this effect would be more likely to occur for people who like to think about and evaluate things all the time.